

# **Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact**

## **Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project**

USDA FOREST SERVICE  
COLVILLE NATIONAL FOREST  
THREE RIVERS RANGER DISTRICT  
FERRY COUNTY, WASHINGTON

This Decision Notice documents my decision regarding actions proposed in the *Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project* Environmental Assessment, September 2010. The Kettle Face EA (Environmental Assessment) is available on request from the Three Rivers Ranger District, 255 West 11<sup>th</sup> Kettle Falls, Washington, 99141 or can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville/> under Projects and Plans/Environmental Analysis. The EA, which is incorporated by reference, documents the site-specific analysis conducted by an interdisciplinary team to determine the potential environmental effects connected to the proposed action.

### **Project Location**

The planning area is located approximately 12 miles northwest of Kettle Falls, Washington. It is wholly within the Three Rivers Ranger District, Colville National Forest, Ferry County, Washington. The planning area contains 26,892 acres within the US Forest Service Administrative Boundary (see EA Project Vicinity Map, page 4). Of that, about 3,834 acres are private or other government administered in-holdings that are not under Forest Service control.

The legal description is as follows:

- T38N, R36E, Sections 1, 2, 10-15, 22-27, and 34-36
- T37N, R36E, Sections 1-4, 8-12, 14-17, 22-28, and 33-36
- T36N, R36E, Section 1
- T37N, R37E, Sections 6, 7, 18, 19, 30, and 31
- T36N, R37E, Sections 3-10

## **Corrections to the Environmental Assessment**

Some units prescribed for mixed severity burn were inadvertently left off the table located in Appendix B of the EA. These units were proposed for underburning, but not with the prescription described in Chapter 2, page 25 of the EA as mixed severity. There are two reasons for changing the Burn type for these units:

- 1) To correct an oversight of not including two mesic units located adjacent to proposed northern block of mixed severity burning (Units N111 and N295).
- 2) To honor agreements made prior to release of the EA during the collaboration process with the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (Units N120, N121, N129, S027, S029, S089, and S090) but inadvertently not carried forward to the EA.

This change in prescription to allow for mixed severity burning was reviewed by the interdisciplinary team and found to have no direct, indirect, or cumulative effect that would change the project analysis as stated in the EA. The following changes would apply to the EA.

*Appendix B would be changed from a Burn type of FUB (underburn) to FMB (mixed severity burn) for the following units: N111, N120, N121, N129, N295, S027, S029, S089, and S090.*

*If the mixed severity burn prescription cannot be successfully implemented based on the external collaborative panel review, where needed, the fuels will be treated by mastication. (Units N120, N121, S027, N129, S029, S089, and S090)*

*The acres of mixed severity listed in Chapter 2, page 25 will change from 374 acres to 512 acres.*

Note that the mixed severity burn prescription in units S027 and S029 would not apply to the entire unit; it only applies to 21 acres in unit S027 and 16 acres in unit S029. All other units listed are changed in their entirety. All Design Elements listed in Chapter 2 of the EA apply.

The logging system for Unit N215 is stated as either helicopter or ground based in the EA. This statement is incorrect and only ground based systems are considered appropriate in N215. This unit falls within Management Requirement Area 12 (pileated/pine marten retention). Helicopter logging would result in an unacceptable loss of snags. Even though underburning will create some snags, somewhat mitigating this, the loss would still be beyond acceptable ranges.

# **The Decision and Rationale for the Decision**

## ***The Decision***

Based upon my review of the *Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project* Environmental Assessment (EA), and the project file, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action including the Design Elements, Best Management Practices, and Monitoring contained therein. The EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

The Selected Alternative will treat approximately 16,203 acres including about 6,952 acres of commercial thinning, 611 acres of precommercial treatment, and 8,597 acres of other fuel treatments. (See EA Appendices A and B and Chapter 2 tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, pages 20, 22, and 24 respectively). It establishes one pine marten/northern three-toed woodpecker Management Requirement area of about 165 acres. It constructs approximately 2.2 miles of new Forest system road and decommissions 7.3 miles of existing Forest system road. About 61 miles of Forest System road will be lightly or moderately reconstructed.

## ***Alternative Selection***

Normally, issues identified during scoping are used to generate alternatives, however, because this project is being prepared under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) authorities, and all units are within a Community Wildfire Prevention Plan Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), no alternatives to the Selected Action were developed. Instead, an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) drew up a list of opportunities for activities to meet the purpose and need in the Kettle Face (KF) planning area and presented them to the public at a public meeting and by letter. The meeting notes, public comments, field data, and internal concerns were then considered and the opportunities narrowed to a draft proposed action. This was presented to the public in a scoping letter and second public meeting. No alternatives were proposed during scoping, or the collaborative process, though follow up discussions with the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (Coalition) and the Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association continued into October of 2010. Concerns raised internally and by the public, user groups, Ferry County, Tribes, other agencies, and the Coalition were screened to identify those that relate to potential impacts of the proposed action within the control of the Forest Service and scope of the project. These concerns were used in the Proposed Action development and analysis (see EA Chapter 1 pages 13-14, Chapter 2 pages 68-73, and Chapter 3). This decision makes the proposed action the Selected Alternative with the changes documented above.

## ***Rationale for the Decision***

I have selected the alternative to meet the purpose and need while addressing concerns about environmental and social impacts expressed by the public.

Due to public concerns regarding the effects of roads on hydrology, wildlife, habitat, soils, and livestock management the amount of new system road construction is minimized while redundant roads and roads causing resource damage are selected for decommissioning. Some roads were proposed for removal, but subsequently dropped due to additional Forest review and input from a local OHV user group. Some new roads will have gating systems designed to facilitate livestock management while not allowing establishment of unintended motorized recreation use. Establishment of unauthorized OHV trails was a concern in an area with sensitive plants, hydrologic issues and proximity to a Potential Wilderness Area that caused a section of temporary road to be dropped. Concern for unauthorized OHV use also resulted in new system and temporary road closure Design Elements with follow up monitoring to ensure that they are effective.

Public comments also highlighted the desire to treat a greater percentage of the planning area. This resulted in the addition of optional burn areas throughout the planning area, but primarily east of Thompson Ridge in the Jackknife Potential Wilderness Area. Conversely, there was concern that treatments in the PWA would deter from its wilderness character, so Design Elements were added defining operational limitations for these optional burns.

The Selected Alternative meets the purpose and need for the project as follows:

1. Create defensible space along access and escape routes to increase public and firefighter safety;
2. Improve fire suppression abilities;
3. Reduce wildland fire risk to homes, structures, infrastructure, and forest values (e.g. wildlife habitats, scenic views, campgrounds, streams, soils);
4. Improve the resiliency of the forest landscape to wildland fire.

During the planning process for the KF project, key access and escape routes under National Forest control were identified. These include key routes in and out of the neighborhoods of Deadman, and Nancy Creeks, and areas of higher use and importance on National Forest System (NFS) land like campgrounds and radio repeater sites. The fuel conditions along these roads typically include dense canopies or ladder fuels with moderate surface fuel loadings. Should a larger wildfire event occur and threaten to spread along or across these roads, most of them would be unsafe to travel and ineffective as fire breaks. The Selected Alternative will treat units along the full extent of the 26.7 miles of key routes identified during planning. In addition to unit treatments, implementation includes about 14.5 miles of shaded fuel break along key routes which provides even greater defensible space, increases fire fighter and public safety, and further improves the ability to control fire spread. Secondary ingress/egress routes will be more readily available and reliable for safe evacuation of Forest users (EA page 84). As recommended by the Ferry County, Washington Community Wildfire Protection Plan

(Schlosser et al. 2006), public in the Deadman Creek area will have safer alternative access and egress routes. Suppression and access for fire fighters would be less hazardous and they would have greater opportunities for direct attack suppression methods. Additionally, the effectiveness of aerial suppression would be enhanced in these areas and the need for fireline construction would be lessened as roads could be used more effectively as fire breaks.

Treatments along the private/NFS boundary and in strategic areas will reduce wildland fire risk to homes, structures, infrastructure, and forest values (for example wildlife habitats, scenic views, campgrounds, streams, soils). During project planning strategic areas for treatment were identified based on: (1) adjacency to private land and critical infrastructure; (2) position in relation to historic fire movement; (3) advantage to fire suppression techniques; (4) ties to previous treatments and natural fuel breaks; and (5) feasibility of treatment (EA page 83). Treatment of the greatest amount of the strategic areas will maximize the Forest's ability to control fire spread and fire type, while creating conditions where fire would burn with less severity. Of the 9,614 acres of units identified as being strategic to meeting the purpose and need, about 80 percent will receive fuel treatment (EA page 82). If a wildfire should start under severe weather conditions, the predicted forested acres that would burn with crown fire will be reduced by about two thirds (EA page 86). The predicted amount of high severity fire (>75% mortality) will be reduced by more than half (EA page 87). In these areas treatments will reduce fuel accumulations and fuel continuity while lessening the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire to forest values and adjacent communities.

By treating about half the private/NFS boundary the Selected Alternative will increase defensible space in the planning area, and cumulatively, add depth to fuel treatments on adjacent private land (EA page 85). The treatments proposed outside of strategically identified areas will provide continuity and additional depth to strategically critical treatments. Many of the treatments outside the strategic areas are optional burns where underburning will be the only treatment. Applied as feasible, optional burns will help to reduce fuels and improve wildfire resilience to the larger landscape.

Historically the forests of the planning area were more resilient to fire and other natural disturbances than they are today. They recovered more quickly and sustained less damage during fire events. All treatments will help reestablishing forest structure and species composition more similar to the historic condition. This will help improve resiliency of forests in the planning area. About half the stands in the planning area were found to be dense enough that inter-tree competition for light, water, and nutrients was decreasing tree vigor and causing tree mortality. These forests are highly susceptible to epidemic insect levels and ever increasing fuel loads. The treatments will remove fuels, improve stand vigor, and decrease their susceptibility to insects. They will promote and preserve existing healthy trees of species resistant to fire and disease (EA pages 94-96).

## **Management Direction**

### ***Forest Plan***

This decision is consistent with the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 1988) as amended. The Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) is the guiding management direction for the Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project area. The Kettle Face EA incorporates the Forest Plan by reference, and is tiered to the Forest Plan's FEIS (Final Environmental Impact Statement, USDA Forest Service 1988). The Forest Plan contains Standards and Guidelines and Management Area designations and prescriptions that apply to the entire Colville National Forest, including the KF project area. Impacts of programmatic decisions contained in the Forest Plan are disclosed in the Forest Plan FEIS. The Forest Plan amendments are also management direction for this project.

Relevant amendments are:

Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2 entitled *Revised Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales* (USDA Forest Service 1995a). This amendment replaced the interim ecosystem and wildlife standards from Regional Forester's Forest Plans Amendment #1. In this interim direction, the Regional Forester directs National Forests in eastern Washington to maintain, and, or enhance late and old structural stages (LOS) in stands subject to timber harvest. Forest Plan Amendment #2 is also referred to as the "Eastside Screens."

*Inland Native Fish Strategy* (USDA Forest Service 1995b). This amendment replaced the interim riparian standard from Regional Forester's Forest Plans Amendment #1. The Inland Native Fish Strategy is also referred to as "INFISH."

Regional Forester's October 11, 2005 amendment to forest plans in Region 6, *Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants*, (Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants Record of Decision, Appendix 1-1). This management direction includes invasive plant prevention and treatment/restoration standards intended to help achieve stated desired future conditions, goals and objectives.

### ***Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA)***

The Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project is consistent with the HFRA. The Kettle Face (KF) Fuel Reduction Project Selected Alternative is based on priorities and concerns laid out in the Ferry County, Washington Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Schlosser et al. 2006); referred to as the CWPP henceforth. The project follows the general location and basic methods of treatments as described in the CWPP (HFRA sections 104(d)(3)). The KF planning area is within a wildland-urban interface at high and moderate risk of wildfire and includes portions of the CWPP's "Strategic Planning Area 2" (HFRA section 102 (a)(1)). Inside the KF planning area the neighborhood of Deadman Creek is listed as moderate to high risk from wildfire due to its location outside of the fire district and its limited access points (CWPP section 4.7.5.7.5). The communities of Barstow and Boyds,

and neighborhoods of Lower Sherman and Nancy Creek were rated at moderate risk. The community of Boyds, located within one mile of the planning area, is listed as a community at risk in the Federal Register August 17, 2001 (Volume 66, Number 106). Among the primary concerns listed in the CWPP for this area are access and egress routes in and out of the communities and neighborhoods and fuel conditions on adjacent forest lands.

## **Public Involvement**

Section 104(e) of the HFRA requires agencies to provide notice of the project and conduct a public meeting when preparing authorized hazardous-fuel reduction projects. Section 104(f) encourages meaningful public participation during preparation of authorized hazardous-fuel reduction projects. Feedback from 56 public comments, 2 public meetings, conversations with Ferry and Stevens County Commissioners, and several meetings with a public user group and the NEWFC Coalition were reviewed and considered. A list of people who submitted oral or written comments can be found in Chapter 4 of the Kettle Face EA and in the project file.

### ***Tribal Consultation***

Letters inviting consultation were sent to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Spokane Tribe, and the Kalispel Tribe of Indians on June 26, 2007 and February 19, 2008. These same governments were contacted with the opportunities letter, public meeting notices, and scoping letter described below. Input was received from the Spokane Tribe on May 5, 2010 indicating the project would have an “Adverse Effect.” On July 7, 2010, the Forest Archaeologist and Spokane Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and Tribal Archeologist visited the specific area of concern to the Tribe. Upon review of the site and the proposed treatments, the “Adverse Effect” determination was withdrawn and changed to “No Effect.”

### ***Public Participation***

The Kettle Face project proposal was listed in the Colville National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions<sup>1</sup> beginning with the Fall 2008 issue and has appeared there every three months since. This was followed with an opportunities letter mailed December 17, 2009 to 269 members of the public and other government agencies outlining the opportunities for fuel treatments in the planning area and asking for input in developing the project. The mailing list was developed by querying the Ferry County Assessors database for residents adjacent to and near the planning area, as well as from the general mailing list maintained in the project file for persons and agencies with general interest in Forest planning. The mailing included a map of the planning area and potential treatments, a description of the project objectives, and some general information regarding the planning area. It also outlined how to participate in the Kettle Face planning process and how comments would be used to develop the proposed action.

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<sup>1</sup> The **Schedule of Proposed Actions** is a quarterly publication that provides notice of upcoming proposals that may undergo environmental analysis and documentation.

All comments were placed in the project file where they were reviewed by interdisciplinary team (IDT) members for topics of concern. A draft summary of the concerns was made available to the IDT January of 2010 and updated as comments were received. Also upon receipt, electronic and written comments (transcribed or scanned) were posted to the Kettle Face project electronic file, accessible to all team members. These comments and the concerns identified from them became the basis on which the opportunities were modified.

A public meeting was held near the project area on January 14, 2010. Fliers announcing the meeting were posted in various public locations of communities adjacent to the project area. These same fliers were sent to 256 members of the public and other government agencies (as above). The public meeting was attended by 24 people in addition to Forest Service employees. Presentations were given regarding proposed fuel treatments including commercial harvest. Also presented was information on State and Federal grant programs designed to help private land owners treat fuels on their own land. Notes from this meeting were made available to the IDT. These notes and 25 additional public comments were used to fine tune the project into a draft proposed action.

On April 27, 2010 a scoping letter and updated map was sent to 268 members of the public, Tribes, and other government agencies outlining the draft proposed action. The letter provided information regarding the project location, deciding official, the commenting process and authority under which the project fell, and how to get more information regarding the proposed action. Simultaneous with this letter was publication of the scoping legal notice in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner*, the newspaper of record for the Forest Supervisor's Office. This notice was published once in this weekly paper on April 28, 2010 and began the 30-day comment period ending May 27, 2010. It was followed on May 20, 2010 with a public meeting to discuss the proposed action. The meeting was publicized similar to the previous meeting and was attended by 14 members of the public and other agencies. A description of the proposed action was given followed by a question and answer period. Notes from this meeting plus comments received from 22 citizens, organizations, local governments, and agencies were used to fine tune the project and its analysis.

On September 22, 2010 a letter was sent to all 51 public participants notifying them the EA was available for review and that the project was entering a 30-day objection period. The letter indicated that individuals with standing could choose to enter an objection with the Regional Forester and outlined the objection process. The legal notice beginning the objection period was published on September 22, 2010 with a notice in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner*. The EA was placed on the Colville National Forest external webpage, and paper copies made available at the District front desk on that same date.

In response to this letter and legal notice, one EA was priority mailed to a recipient. The follow up discussion with the person discussed the objection process; how to object and the associated timelines.



### ***Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association***

The Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association is a user created group of motorized recreation enthusiasts. At the group's request, the District Ranger and members of the IDT met with the group's president and other members to review the proposed action and receive feedback. Meetings took place in January, March, May, and August of 2010. The group commented during the scoping period. These meetings and their comments were reviewed for concerns relevant to the proposed project, and incorporated into the proposed action and analysis as described in this EA.

### ***Ferry and Stevens County Participation***

The KF project was first introduced to commissioners of Ferry and Stevens Counties at the January 8, 2008 Proof of Concept meeting. This was followed by an update on the project at the July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Public Lands Advisory Committee (PLAC) meeting. PLAC is a group appointed by the commissioners to promote council interests with the Stevens County Commissioners. In December of 2008 Ferry County Commissioners, at their request, were presented with a draft opportunities map of the KF project. The KF project was also mentioned at various undocumented Committee meetings that occur regularly between the Forest and the Counties. On record was presentation of the KF project at the January 14, 2010 Stevens County PLAC meeting, and a conversation between the KF Project Team Leader and Ferry County Commissioner Brad Miller (January 8, 2010). Comments received March 8, 2010 concerned the scope of the project and were incorporated into the proposed action. Each commissioner was also mailed the project opportunities letter (December 17, 2009) and scoping letter (April 27, 2010). County commissioner Joe Bond attended the May 20, 2010 public meeting.

### ***Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition Participation***

The NEWF Coalition (Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition), a non-profit coalition of environmental and industrial groups, participated in a collaboration process with the Colville National Forest on the KF project. Currently, the Colville National Forest and the NEWF Coalition have agreed to employ a collaborative process during the planning process with defined steps (Version 17 dated 06/04/2007). Those steps culminated in support from NEWF Coalition during collaboration. As part of the support it was agreed that on units where mixed severity prescribed burning would be used, that mechanical prescriptions would be reviewed by an external collaborative panel review consisting of one or all of the following: Derrick Churchill, Terrie Jain and/or Russ Graham, external to the Colville National Forest. This option would allow for consideration and agreement on "clear and compelling" exceptions to implementing the higher-mortality prescribed fire prescription (mixed severity burn) following mechanical treatment in some of these units.

### ***EA Objection Period***

Section 105(a) of the HFRA replaces the USDA Forest Service's administrative appeals process with an objection process that occurs before the decision approving authorized fuel-reduction projects under the act. Participation is limited to individuals or organizations who have submitted specific written comments related to the proposed

project during the opportunity for public comment provided when an EA is being prepared for the project (Section 105(a)(3), 36 CFR 218.6). Written objections, including any attachment, must be filed with the reviewing officer within 30 days after the publication date of the legal notice of the EA in the newspaper of record (Section 218.4(b)).

The 30 day objection-filing period for the Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project began on September 22, 2010 with publication of a legal notice in the *Colville Statesman Examiner*, the newspaper of record for the Colville National Forest (36 CFR 218.9(3)). Additionally, letters were mailed to all individuals or organizations who have submitted specific written comments related to the proposed project during the opportunity for public comment. The letter mailed on September 22, 2010 stated the EA was available for review and how to proceed with an objection should they choose. The objection-filing period ended October 21, 2010.

Two objections and one collaborative concern were received. 4 meetings were held to review and address the concerns with each objector and also the collaboration group.

One objection was received from Mike Blankenship, president of the Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association (TCMRA) in an emailed letter received October 22, 2010. The first and only resolution meeting with TCMRA was held on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010 to discuss the objection and try to resolve outstanding issues. Issues could not be resolved so the objection has standing. The primary issue that TCMRA has is in regards to the proposed decommissioning of road 9500568. TCMRA believes that is not a good candidate for decommissioning and should be removed from the list.

A second objection letter from Mitchell Smith was received, October 18, 2010. The first meeting was held November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010 where Mitchell expressed his concerns and what he would need in order support the project. Small scale maps and ortho-photos of the project area with the proposed action were sent to Mitchell in preparation for the second meeting, December 1, 2010. After reviewing the maps and having the discussion with team members, we agreed with Mitchell to better define the silvicultural prescriptions along the Jackknife and Hoodoo Potential Wilderness Boundaries. Any management activities would utilize feathering in order to have treatments transition towards denser trees at the ridge (boundary). Signs of management and less dense trees would become more apparent as you travel farther from the boundary. Fire will use tighter prescriptions as a tool for feathering. Although resolution was reached and agreed too, Mitchell chose not to pull his objection.

November 22, 2010 the Regional Forester reviewed the objections to determine whether any substantial flaws were identified in the Environmental Assessment. None were found and the Forest was instructed to proceed with issuance of a decision for this project without any changes to the Environmental Assessment.

Niether objection was withdrawn, so both objectors have standing to appeal.

## **Concerns**

Concerns raised during the scoping period by the public and other agencies are listed on pages 13 and 14 in the EA. Of these, concern for effects of the proposed actions on economics, water quality and yield, forest health, prescribed fire escape, air quality, road safety during implementation, livestock management, motorized recreation opportunities, potential wilderness area project scale, qualities, fish habitat, soil productivity, visual quality, climate change, forest fragmentation, and flora and fauna were identified as being issues within the scope of the project. These concerns were tracked throughout the EA, and are mitigated as needed either through project design (Chapter 2), Design Elements (pages 37-65), and, or, Best Management Practices (Appendix D).

## **Alternatives Considered**

### ***No Action***

The No Action alternative is described as not implementing actions proposed under this environmental analysis. Under the HFRA authority agencies are not expected to develop a full no-action alternative. However, they should evaluate the effects of failing to implement the project. This information can be found in Chapter 3 on pages 76-79 and in the specialists' reports.

### ***Selected Action***

A description of the Selected Action can be found in the EA Chapter 2 (Proposed Action) pages 17-67, and Appendix B. A unit map is located in Appendix A and transportation map in Appendix C. Design Elements (and mitigation measures) are described on pages 37-65, monitoring procedures are described on pages 66-67, and Best Management Practices are described in Appendix D of the EA.

## **Consistency with the Forest Plan, Laws, Regulations, and Policies**

The *Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* was developed and approved December 29, 1988. I find that this project is consistent with the *Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* and its amendments.

The project was designed in conformance with standards and guidelines for management of the management areas within the planning area, Forest Plan pages 4-35 through 4-60.

- **Management Area 3A** (325 acres) Emphasis is on recreation: The goal is to provide roaded and unroaded recreation opportunities in a natural appearing setting.
- **Management Area 5** (5,309 acres) Emphasis is scenic/timber: The goal is to provide a natural appearing foreground, middle, and background along major scenic travel routes while providing wood products.

- **Management Area 6** (2,409 acres) Emphasis is scenic/winter range: The goal is to provide a natural appearing foreground, middle, and background along major scenic travel routes while providing for big game winter range management.
- **Management Area 7** (9,466 acres) Emphasis is wood/forage: The goal is to manage to achieve optimum production of timber products while protecting basic resources.
- **Management Area 8** (4,727 acres) Emphasis is big game winter range: The goal is to meet the habitat needs of deer (mule deer west of the Columbia River) and elk to sustain carrying capacity at 120 percent of the 1980 level, while managing timber and other resources consistent with fish and wildlife management objectives.
- **Management Area 10** (815 acres) Emphasis is on semi-primitive and motorized recreation: The goal is to provide opportunities for dispersed, motorized recreation.

The actions are consistent with direction contained in Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2 and with INFISH Direction (EA page 8).

The actions are consistent with the Forest Plan because Design Elements (EA pages 37-65), and Best Management Practices (EA Appendix D), have been fully applied in the selected action. The project is feasible and reasonable, and it results in applying management practices that meet the *Forest Plan* overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services.

### ***Congressionally Designated Areas***

The planning area contains portions of two Potential Wilderness Areas (PWA); Jackknife and Hoodoo. No treatments are proposed in the Hoodoo PWA. The Selected Alternative will underburn in the Jackknife PWA (see Chapter 2, Surface Fuel Treatments) but will cause no loss of acreage that could be included in wilderness consideration. The two PWAs will continue to meet the criteria for being evaluated and recommended for placement on the potential wilderness inventory during the forest plan revision process (FSH 1909.12 Chapters 71.1 and 71.11).

The project area does not contain any inventoried roadless areas (IRAs). The Hoodoo IRA is located about  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles west of the planning area; the Selected Alternative will have no direct or indirect effects on the IRA. The planning area contains no other existing or candidate Congressionally Designated areas.

### ***National Forest Management Act***

The selected actions which alter vegetation meet the minimum specific requirements of the National Forest Management Act (see Forest Service Manual 1921.12). Rationale is as follows:

1. Soil productivity will be irreversibly damaged in the construction of new roads, landings, and rock pits. However, these effects are within Forest Plan guidelines. See EA page 118 and the Soils Report in the project file (Talbot-Williams 2010).

2. There is assurance that the lands can be adequately restocked within five years after final regeneration harvest (FSM 1921.12g). See EA page 28 and the Fuels and Silvicultural report in the project file (Pass and Robson 2010).
3. Streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water are protected from detrimental changes in water temperatures, blockages of water courses, and deposits of sediment where harvests are likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat: See EA pages 122-141, and the Hydrology and Riparian and Fisheries reports (Hickenbottom 2010; Honeycutt 2010) located in the project file.
4. The harvesting systems to be used are not selected primarily because they will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber.
5. The interdisciplinary review has been completed and the potential environmental, biological, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts have been assessed on each advertised sale area and the cutting methods are consistent with the multiple use of the general area.
6. Timber harvest is carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, aesthetic resources, cultural and historic resources, and the regeneration of timber resources. See discussion on EA pages 80-220 and Soils, Hydrology, Fisheries, Wildlife, Recreation, Visual Quality, and Silviculture and Fuels reports in the project file (Talbot-Williams 2010; Hickenbottom 2010; Honeycutt 2010; Loggers 2010a, Loggers 2010b; McQuay 2010; Hintze and Bodie 2010; and Pass and Robson 2010, respectively).

### ***Other Laws, Regulations, and Policies***

This project is consistent with all laws, regulations, and policies listed below.

**Federal Water Pollution Control Act and Amendments of 1972 (the Clean Water Act), and Executive Order 11990 Protection of Wetlands:** The project is in compliance with the Clean Water Act and EO 11990 because it has no significant adverse impacts on water quality or wetlands. See EA pages 122-133 and 218, Appendix D Best Management Practices, and Hydrology Report and Appendices in the project file (Hickenbottom 2010).

**36 CFR 296 Protection of Archaeological Resources, and 36 CFR 800 protection of Historic Properties:** The project is in compliance with regulations that protect archaeological and historic properties. See EA pages 201-203, and Heritage Resource report (Chilvers 2010) and Colville National Forest Section 106 Compliance form in the project file.

**National Environmental Policy Act of January 1, 1970, and Forest Service Manual 1950:** This project is consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act and Forest Service Manual 1950. Project planning and the environmental analysis (a) used a systematic interdisciplinary approach in planning and decision making, (b) considered the environmental impact of proposed actions (see EA Chapter 3), (c) identified adverse effects which could not be avoided should the project be implemented (see EA pages 218 and 219), (d) considered alternatives to the proposed actions (not applicable to HFRA

projects), (e) considered the relationship between local short-term uses of the human environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity, (EA page 218) and (f) identified any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented (see EA page 219).

The environmental analysis followed regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508, which establish procedures and rules governing environmental analysis and documentation; ensure that environmental information is available to public officials and the public (see EA pages 10-12 and Chapter 4), including identification of issues (see EA pages 13 and 14); and provide direction to assist public officials in making decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences.

The environmental analysis also followed Forest Service implementing procedures in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, chapters Zero, 10, and 40.

**Endangered Species Act:** The effects on endangered or threatened species and their habitats are discussed in the *Biological Evaluation* in the Analysis File, with results summarized in the EA on pages 142-165 for terrestrial wildlife; pages 134-141 for fish; and pages 180-183 for plants.

The Selected Alternative “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” grizzly bears (threatened) or grizzly bear habitat (EA page 156). The Selected Alternative “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” for gray wolves (endangered) or gray wolf habitat (EA page 158). The Selected Alternative “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” lynx (threatened) because the project has been planned using the best available science (Ruggiero et al. 1999). The Likelihood of Adverse Effects is “low” because the Selected Alternative used the best available science to eliminate potential negative effects. The Consequence of Adverse Effects is “low” because lynx probably do not occupy the lynx habitat in the planning area (EA page 161). The project will “not likely to lead toward a trend to federal listing or loss of viability” to redband trout, Umatilla dace, and westslope cutthroat trout. The Selected Alternative is “not likely to adversely affect” Bull Trout and Pygmy Whitefish, since they are not in the area, however habitat does exist and will be protected under INFISH (EA page 140). No federally listed threatened or endangered plants or plants proposed for federal listing are known to occur in the Kettle Face analysis area (EA page 180).

The *Biological Evaluation* was submitted for review to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service September 2010. A letter of concurrence was received March 24, 2011.

**Direction Letter for Neotropical Migratory Birds:** The project is consistent with various requirements for conservation of migratory birds. See EA pages 162-163 and Management Indicator Species wildlife report in project file (Loggers 2010a).

**Clean Air Act of August 7, 1977:** The primary objective of the Clean Air Act is to establish federal standards for air pollutants from stationary and mobile sources, and to work with the states to regulate polluting emissions. The Act is designed to improve air

quality in areas of the country which do not meet federal standards and to prevent significant deterioration in areas where air quality exceeds those standards.

The act requires states to develop state implementation plans, which set limits on emissions to assure that air quality within the state will meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. By including requirements for approval from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources prior to fuel reduction ignitions, and by Washington State Department of Ecology monitoring of dust potentially created during rock crushing operations, the project is consistent with the Clean Air Act. See EA pages 210-216, and the Silviculture and Fuels report in project file (Pass and Robson 2010).

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

I have determined through the *Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project Environmental Assessment* (EA) that this is not a major federal action individually or cumulatively that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. In considering the context of this project, all impacts will occur locally and will not have a cumulative effect on the Region or Nation as a whole. The following factors were considered in regards to the intensity of the localized impacts:

- 1. Analysis of the beneficial impacts and adverse resource damage** (see EA Chapter 2 for a summary of consideration of comments and 3 for full discussion of effects).
  - Approximately 80 percent of identified strategic areas treated;
  - Approximately 100 percent of key access and escape routes treated;
  - Crown fire potential reduced by about 40 percentage points under extreme weather conditions;
  - High fire severity reduced by about 28 percentage points under extreme weather conditions;
  - Open dry Douglas-fir late and old structure promoted on about 36 percent of the planning area;
  - No loss of late and old structure;
  - Competition induced mortality reduced by about 40 percentage points;
  - Defoliator susceptibility reduced by about 36 percentage points;
  - Bark beetle susceptibility reduced by about 17 percentage points;
  - Net loss of 5.1 miles of Forest system road;
  - Irreversible and irretrievable commitment of about 137 acres of land to roads and landings;
  - Potential for erosion to occur, but unlikely delivery to streams due to maintenance of RHCAs;
  - Decrease in soil organisms populations, but no decrease in diversity;

- Short term increases in sediment yield to streams due to road reconstruction, but long term reduction in sedimentation due to improved management of water from roads resulting from road reconstruction;
- Low risk of change in stream function;
- Potential decrease in water quality due to cattle and user access;
- Decrease in water yield especially during peak flows due to improved water diversions off roads;
- Riparian management objectives will be maintained or enhanced;
- Potential effects of noxious weed spread to big game and grizzly bear forage outweighed by effects of improved forage due to treatments;
- Short term loss of winter forage and lateral (escape/hiding) cover; long term improvement;
- Minimal effects to big game winter seclusion habitat;
- Positive long term effect to woodpeckers due to promotion of large trees;
- Creates on new 165 acre pine martin/northern three-toed woodpecker management requirement area;
- May effect, but not likely to adversely affect gray wolves, grizzly bear, and Canada lynx;
- Slight positive effect to summer nesting/brooding habitat for dusky grouse;
- Some decrease in large raptor nesting and foraging habitat, but sufficient habitat remains;
- Beneficial to migratory land bird, beaver, and wolverine habitat;
- Slight negative effect to fisher habitat due to snag removal;
- Not likely to effect, or no effect to invertebrate species;
- Noxious weed populations not likely to spread substantially, and could decrease;
- Potential increases in primary range lands quality;
- Potential compromise of livestock barriers in some units. Follow up monitoring and fencing will mitigate;
- About 6,900 acres of transitory range created;
- No effects to sensitive plants;
- No loss of wilderness characteristics in the Jackknife PWA or Hoodoo PWA;
- Potential enhancement of visual quality;
- No effects to heritage sites;
- Produce up to about 36.1 million board feet;
- Deficit about 2 million dollars to fully implement;
- Temporary increases in traffic due to logging activity and restriction of traffic on some routes.

## **2. The degree to which the Selected Action affects public health and safety:**

There are a number of health and safety hazards to Forest Service Employees, private contractors involved with carrying out the Selected Action, and the general public. None are unusual or unique to the KF Project. These are discussed in the EA on pages 210-216, and include discussions of effects related to Smoke, Dust, Increased Traffic, Logging Hazards, Prescribed Burning Hazards, Weed Treatments, Noise,



Improved Road Safety, and Reduced Wildfire Risk. Based on the discussions in the EA and review of many similar projects, these public health and safety effects are not significant.

**3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**

The Kettle Face planning area does not contain any unique characteristics or features relative to the geographic area (EA page 219).

**4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**

Projects of this type have been done a large number of times not only on National Forest System lands but also on state and private lands for several decades (EA pages 219-220). The effects of this type of project are well known and are documented in Chapter 3 of the EA as well as the numerous references used in this analysis.

Therefore, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial.

**5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:**

There were no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified for the Kettle Face project (EA page 219).

**6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects:**

None of the selected actions in the Kettle Face project set precedents (EA page 220).

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts:**

Each effects analysis contained in the EA discusses cumulative effects; none are significant (for Fire, Fuels and Forests see EA pages 97-98; Roads pages 109-110; Soils page 121; Hydrology pages 132-133; Riparian Areas and Fisheries pages 140-141; Big Game pages 146-147; Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Pine Marten and Northern Three-toed Woodpecker page 153; Grizzly Bear pages 156-157; Gray Wolf page 158; Canada Lynx pages 161-162; Noxious Weeds page 172; Range page 179; Sensitive Plants page 183; Recreation pages 193-194; Visual Quality page 200; Heritage page 203; Economics page 205-206; Special Uses page 209; and Public Health and Safety pages 215-216).

**8. The degree to which the action may affect scientific, cultural, or historical resources.**

There are no scientific resources in the Kettle Face planning area. The effects on cultural or historical resources are discussed in the EA on pages 201-203. Identified sites will be protected during layout and implementation. Design features are in place

to protect any newly discovered sites. The project has been certified as complying with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (in project file).

**8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect endangered or threatened species or habitats:**

The effects on endangered or threatened species and their habitats are discussed in the *Biological Evaluation* in the Analysis File, with results summarized in the EA on pages 142-165 for terrestrial wildlife; pages 134-141 for fish; and pages 180-183 for plants.

The Selected Alternative “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” grizzly bears (threatened) or grizzly bear habitat (EA page 156). The Selected Alternative “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” for gray wolves (endangered) or gray wolf habitat (EA page 158). The Selected Alternative “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect” lynx (threatened) because the project has been planned using the best available science (Ruggiero et al. 1999). The Likelihood of Adverse Effects is “low” because the Selected Alternative used the best available science to eliminate potential negative effects. The Consequence of Adverse Effects is “low” because lynx probably do not occupy the lynx habitat in the planning area (EA page 161). The project will “not likely to lead toward a trend to federal listing or loss of viability” to redband trout, Umatilla dace, and westslope cutthroat trout. The Selected Alternative is “not likely to adversely affect” Bull Trout and Pygmy Whitefish, since they are not in the area, however habitat does exist and will be protected under INFISH (EA page 140). No federally listed threatened or endangered plants or plants proposed for federal listing are known to occur in the Kettle Face analysis area (EA page 180).

The *Biological Evaluation* was submitted for review to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service September 2010. A letter of concurrence was received March 24, 2011.

**9. Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental laws or requirements.**

The Kettle Face project has been examined in relation to a number of environmental laws and requirements, and has been found to be in compliance in all cases. Discussion of compliance with environmental laws or requirements was discussed on the following EA pages:

- the *Clean Water Act* (EA pages 122-133, Appendix D Best Management Practices, and Hydrology Report in the project file (Hickenbottom 2010),
- the *National Historic Preservation Act* (Colville National Forest Section 106 Compliance form in project file),
- the *Endangered Species Act* (EA on pages 142-165 for terrestrial wildlife; pages 134-141 for fish; and pages 180-183 for plants and USDI FWS concurrence letter in Analysis File),
- the *National Environmental Policy Act* (EA in its entirety),
- the *National Forest Management Act* (EA page 8 and 28, the Silviculture and Fuels report [Robson and Pass 2010] and Soils report [Talbot-Williams 2010] in project file),

- the *United States Clean Air Act* (EA pages 210-213 and the Silviculture and Fuels report [Robson and Pass 2010] report in the project file).

There are no known significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable losses of timber production, or water quality (EA page 219). Irreversible effects were identified for soils on approximately 137 acres (EA page 118).

Prime farmlands, prime rangeland, wetlands and floodplains near the planned actions will not be significantly affected (see EA page 218).

Consumers, civil rights, minority groups, and women will not be significantly affected (see EA page 217).

### ***EA Objection Period***

Section 105(a) of the HFRA replaces the USDA Forest Service's administrative appeals process with an objection process that occurs before the decision approving authorized fuel-reduction projects under the act. Participation is limited to individuals or organizations who have submitted specific written comments related to the proposed project during the opportunity for public comment provided when an EA is being prepared for the project (Section 105(a)(3), 36 CFR 218.6). Written objections, including any attachment, must be filed with the reviewing officer within 30 days after the publication date of the legal notice of the EA in the newspaper of record (Section 218.4(b)).

The 30 day objection-filing period for the Kettle Face Fuel Reduction Project began on September 22, 2010 with publication of a legal notice in the *Colville Statesman Examiner*, the newspaper of record for the Colville National Forest (36 CFR 218.9(3)). Additionally, letters were mailed to all individuals or organizations who have submitted specific written comments related to the proposed project during the opportunity for public comment. The letter mailed on September 22, 2010 stated the EA was available for review and how to proceed with an objection should they choose. The objection-filing period ended October 21, 2010.

Two objections and one collaborative concern were received. 4 meetings were held to review and address the concerns with each objector and also the collaboration group.

One objection was received from Mike Blankenship, president of the Tri-County Motorized Recreation Association (TCMRA) in an emailed letter received October 22, 2010. The first and only resolution meeting with TCMRA was held on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010 to discuss the objection and try to resolve outstanding issues. Issues could not be resolved so the objection has standing. The primary issue that TCMRA has is in regards

to the proposed decommissioning of road 9500568. TCMRA believes that is not a good candidate for decommissioning and should be removed from the list.

A second objection letter from Mitchell Smith was received, October 18, 2010. The first meeting was held November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010 where Mitchell expressed his concerns and what he would need in order support the project. Small scale maps and ortho-photos of the project area with the proposed action were sent to Mitchell in preparation for the second meeting, December 1, 2010. After reviewing the maps and having the discussion with team members, we agreed with Mitchell to better define the silvicultural prescriptions along the JackKnife and Hoodoo Potential Wilderness Boundaries. Any management activities would utilize feathering in order to have treatments transition towards denser trees at the ridge (boundary). Signs of management and less dense trees would become more apparent as you travel farther from the boundary. Fire will use tighter prescriptions as a tool for feathering. Although resolution was reached and agreed too, Mitchell chose not to pull his objection, so he still has standing.

November 22, 2010 the Regional Forester reviewed the objections to determine whether any substantial flaws were identified in the Environmental Assessment. None were found and the Forest was instructed to proceed with issuance of a decision for this project without any changes to the Environmental Assessment.

### ***Implementation***

A pre-decisional objection opportunity was offered on this project under 36 CFR 218. Two objections and one collaborative comment were received. This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(i). The objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 provided the sole means of administrative review for this HFRA project. This objection process has been completed, the two objections were not withdrawn, there will be no further review by any other Forest Service or USDA official. Implementation may occur immediately.

### ***Contact Information***

For further information, contact District Ranger Rodney Smoldon, Colville National Forest, at Three Rivers Ranger District, 255 West 11<sup>th</sup> Kettle Falls, WA 99141 or phone (509) 738-7700.

### ***Signature of Responsible Official and Date Signed***

/s/ Laura Jo West  
LAURA JO WEST  
Forest Supervisor  
Deciding Official

March 30, 2011  
Date